

Summertime, and the leavin' is easy

By Leslie Wright
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Who doesn't look forward to Fridays -- especially Fridays in the summer when daylight is plentiful and the weather is warm? For some workers, summer Fridays are extra sweet.

Many companies offer their employees a deal. Work a little longer Monday through Thursday, and you may leave a little earlier on Friday.

Suzanne Sprague can't wait to take advantage of the half day she takes at the end of each work week in the summer. She'll take her children for a hike to the pool.

"Summers are very short here and those extra four hours make it seem endless. It's just great," said Sprague, who is sales and fulfillment manager at Ashgate Publishing, an academic publisher of books and journals with North American headquarters in Burlington.

Companies say summer hours are a win-win situation for employees and employers alike. Ashgate Publishing started summer hours more than a decade ago when the company was Brookfield Publishing in Brookfield.

It was one of those star-crossed summers where it rained every weekend and was sunny during the week. Hoping to catch at least a sliver of sunshine, the owners decided to allow employees to trade longer hours during the week for more time on Friday afternoons, said Burta Rowekamp finance and human resources manager.

The experiment became company policy that stuck even when the company changed hands.

Summer hours have turned out to be a benefit that Ashgate capitalizes on to draw new employees. Ashgate, which employs 17 people, competes with university presses across the country for workers. The universities typically offer rich benefits packages, Rowekamp said.

"It's very much a hiring and retention tool because it's hard to beat, having those summer hours when you work in Vermont. It's a huge perk," Rowekamp said.

At Hampton Direct in Williston, employees start their days 45 minutes earlier than normal, arriving at 7:45 a.m. and working until 5 p.m. on Monday through Thursday. On Friday the day ends at 12:45 p.m.

Summer hours are universally popular among the company's 33 employees, said Tim George, chief financial officer at the catalog merchandising company that imports and distributes consumer products.

"What a lot of people really like about the summer hours is it gives them an opportunity to get them a head start on a long weekend," George said.

Summer hours aren't limited to small companies like Ashgate Publishing and Hampton Direct. National Life Group, based in Montpelier with 800 employees, has had a policy in force for about 20 years, said company spokesman Chris Graff.

Employees come in 15 minutes early Monday through Thursday and leave at 3:30 p.m. on Fridays. Coverage in certain areas of the company, such as stock trading, is worked out by supervisors, Graff said.

National Life employee David Gilmore of Barre has no trouble budgeting his extra hour and 15 minutes on Friday. The avid fly fisherman is out the door and headed to the nearest stream.

"We use it to get to camp a little bit earlier or it means we can go a little farther to fish," Gilmore said. Contact Leslie Wright at 802-660-1841 or lwright@bfp.burlingtonfreepress.com



Tim George, chief financial officer of import company Hampton Direct in Williston, says the company's employees enjoy getting off work at 12:45 p.m. on Fridays during the summer months. Employees work slightly longer shifts Monday through Thursday to make up for the abbreviated workday. RYAN MERCER, Free Press